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European Spatial Politics and Spatial Policy for Europe: an analysis of some notions.

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Summary :

This paper deals with notions of European spatial planning. Some of them are analysed thanks to the theoretical framework of complexity. For us, the notions involved in the definition of policies are also the product of a political process. What is more, we think that the “quality” of these notions relies on their ability (more precisely, the ability of the actors which are using them) to combine policy making and political process and constraints in a rather unpredictable way that generate different interpretations and different results.

Key words :

Complexity, Multilevel, Notions, Spatial Planning, Actors, Contexts, Scales, Territorial Cohesion, Island, Euroregion.

I – Introduction : a policy making process and a political process.

In the title of the seminar, politics and policy seem to be presented in an alternative perspective. At a first sight, it implies a sharp difference between shaping ideas and put them into practice through administrative bodies on the one hand, and the day-to-day activity of political life on the other hand; between “intergovernmentalism” (politics) and transnational actions (policies). This view is somehow an idealistic one because all processes of policy making interact with various elements that lead, through a political process, to action; and, action by itself influences the definition of terms and notions generally used to deal with European spatial planning. The whole European project epitomizes quite well this point of view.

The shaping of a European spatial policy is both a policy making process and a political process. From that point view, the European strategy in terms of spatial planning is influenced by a constant need to adapt different views in interaction at different scales (local, regional, national and European). This process it is not only an institutional one. It is influenced by different geographical, social, economic, administrative and political forces (lobbies, experts, local and regional representatives...). Ideas and contexts interact through different

unpredictable processes. What is more, the relationship between ideas and contexts is complex because of the national and / or regional planning traditions (or lack of planning traditions), which also interact in that process of policy building at a supra-national level. European spatial policy has not only to take into account concrete contexts but also planning actions which are already put in practice in countries, regions or localities.

What is the kind of result to be obtained through such a complex situation? Can we answer in a simple way to the following question : who lead spatial planning in Europe? Should we renounce to any kind of general overview on European spatial planning? As we considered it as a process, are we restricted to a kind of ex-post explanation? We do not think so, because of the nature of territorial problems the European Union has to deal with. As many territorial problems are shared in the UE 15 and even in the UE 27 the way of dealing with the proposal is rather convergent. Let us enumerate some common issues : expansion of the cities, increasing segregation in the urban centres, changing roles and functions of rural zones, increasing difference between rural areas, increasing interdependency between rural and urban areas, frontiers barriers, preservation of the environment and cultural heritage. These common issues are addressed in official document such as the ESDP as “political options”. They are based on the identification of territorial issues identified through different kinds of expertise. It implies a series of notions of different scopes (examples : Territorial cohesion, Polycentrism, Transeuropean networks...) that European planners should refer to. We think that the “quality” of these notions relies on their ability (more precisely, the ability of the actors which are using them) to combine policy making and political process and constraints in a rather unpredictable way that generate different interpretations and different results. Because of the incremental nature of the shaping of a European spatial planning policy, we will present a temporary approach of the meaning of some notions given that it has to be considered as the result of different interactions¹ and combinations. What we want to identify is how these notions are built and what are their consequences in operational terms in order to lighten the general point of view presented above.

Firtsly, we will present the chosen theoretical approach. The paper will then propose an analysis of three terms. It will consist in presenting the “trajectory” of these notions, their territorial links, their fields of use and their operational interest. As a conclusion, we will propose a synthesis of this notion building process.

I – Theoretical approach : multilevel complexity and complexity within non linear dynamics.

We have chosen to tackle the question of European spatial policy from the paradigm of complexity. Complexity does not mean complicated. A complicated situation can involve a lot of actors and elements but the interactions between them are only founded upon very simple combinations. A complex system is quite different from a mechanistic one. Uncertainty, non-linearity, unpredictability are the key words of this paradigm. It means that a complex system is not organized to reach a specific result. It depends on how actors interact and how they act in a changing and interconnected world.

¹ For instance, interactions between different types of actors : institutions of the European Union, representative organisms based on a territorial aggregation as Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe or Euroregions, representatives of regional or local authorities as The Assembly of European Region for example, or regional and local authorities themselves.

The science of complexity offers new ways of understanding organizational systems like the European Union. European Union can be seen as a set of institutional actors and political units created to realize some goals. But, most of the time, the final result does not match either with the interests of one single dominant actor nor with what could appear as the minimum consensual solutions between actors.

This theory enables to underline changes, conversions, or to point out the emergence of a new structure or a new shape. Complex systems are the opposite of determinist schemes, which only consider the future as the continuation of former trends. To predict precisely a single final result is impossible because it is also impossible to explain the results thanks to a single element of change.

Looking at European spatial policy as a complex system lead to a comprehensive approach of the way European policies are built in that field. From this point of view, we identify two basic characteristics of European spatial policy :

- it is defined through interactions between several scales and several spatial planning actors (multi-level complexity). Indeed, even at the same geographical level (region for instance), the role, status and competencies of actors can change from one country to another (different contexts). The main interests are to detect the changing role of each element which can move from one level to another.
- it is the result of processes in which each element as well as the macro-structure, do not keep the same role all the time. They can be modified and their transformation can lead to the transformation of the global structure (complexity within non linear dynamics).

II – Examples of notions

We have chosen three notions to illustrate our view point : Territorial Cohesion, Euroregion and Island. Even if these three notions are of a different scope, they can be analysed in terms of complexity as notions which allow to combine different useful dimensions (scales, contexts, actors) at the time of shaping a policy.

- “Territorial cohesion” : general perspective for Europe, political process and consideration of territorial diversity.

In 1993, leading up to the intergovernmental conference at Amsterdam, The Assembly of European Region (AER), had decided to conduct a debate on the future of Europe. The report of the working group responsible for examining the impact of community policies on territories was approved by the AER in a resolution voted by unanimity in 1995. It noted the significant and differentiated impacts of policies, and the risks of territorial “destructuring” which results from them. The report finished with a request : replace the twin terms of economic and social cohesion of Article 2 of the Community treaty by the triple terms economic, social and territorial cohesion. Michel BARNIER, at that time French Minister of European Affairs, introduced it into the discussion of Article 7d of the Amsterdam Treaty.

Today, even if it is not a clearly defined, territorial cohesion appears as a central notion in the field of the European spatial policy. Consequently, what does territorial cohesion mean? What is the significance of the reference to a territorial dimension?

Taking into account the objective to reduce differences of development between member States regions (Treaty of Rome), speaking about cohesion seems to be rather less ambitious. But territorial cohesion it is also presented as the complement of the economic and social cohesion (1986 Single Act). From that point of view, territorial cohesion is presented as the third dimension of the objective to strengthen convergence and solidarity within Europe.

Article 16 of the Consolidated Treaties established a link between the promotion of territorial cohesion in the Union and services of general economic interest². Consequently, to preserve and attain an acceptable level of services everywhere appears as an essential aspect of the cohesion word. By the way, the access to services of general economic interest becomes a major issue for a spatial planning policy. What is more, as services of general economic interest are considered in the Treaty as « shared values of the Union », territorial cohesion also bears what could be defined as a European model of society in a context of globalisation.

The signification in operational terms it is a move away from regional planning to think about an intervention at the European scale. It is to recognize the European Union a competence of territorial nature. As a political issue, territorial cohesion can be defined as an aim or perspective rather than as a reality that can be observed and measured. Nevertheless, if territorial cohesion refers to a general overview on European spatial planning and the way it should be oriented, it also deals with diversity within the territory of the European Union.

Indeed, speaking about territorial cohesion is to recognize that what is at stake is cohesion itself³, particularly with enlargement. Consequently, speaking about territorial cohesion is a way to recognize that the idea of cohesion is under threat.

Looking at it in a more positive perspective would consist of answering the following question : taking into account centrifugal forces of globalisation, how to deal with an increasing diversity of social, economic situations and, to a certain extent, with different cultural heritages within Europe? From that point of view, territorial cohesion can be considered as a high political aim which has something to do with the building of a European identity by referring to a common pattern of society (the so called “social market economy”) able to integrate diversity; that is to say to take into account the territorial dimension of cohesion. That is why territorial cohesion has again much more to do with a process of unpredictable path of desirable results rather than a reality that can be observed or measured.

From that point of view, territorial cohesion can be considered as a unanimous expression in which each actor can identify its own territory as far as the territory is defined as a space shaped by societies through actions and representations and which can be observed at different scales (European Union, Member states, regional or local) without referring to an clear administrative level of decision⁴.

Meanwhile, there is no doubt that it has an increasing influence on shaping a European spatial policy⁵. The use of specific method to define policies, as the Open Method of Coordination⁶,

² They designate trading service activities carrying out general interest roles, and subject for this reason to specific public service obligations by member States. This is particularly the case in network services, or public utilities, such as transport, energy and communications.

³ From that point view, the appearance of the “cohesion” word in the field of regional policies dated back to the Cohesion fund created (Maastricht Treaty) to counterbalance structural weaknesses of some membre states.

⁴ From that point of view, region is a much more precise term as far as it often refers to specific authorities.

⁵ Territorial cohesion is quoted in the Constitution project (article 3).

epitomizes quite well what could be the methodological consequence of territorial cohesion as far as this method is specially tolerant with diversity which involve the recognition of member States viewpoints but also the one of regional and local actors involved in cross-border and transnational networks, for instance.

Then from a very general perspective on the future of the European Union, the question is to shape common policies through a very political process in a global perspective taking into account territorial diversity.

- “Island” : a relative notion.

An island is defined by EUROSTAT as a territory of at least one kilometres square and of fifty permanent inhabitants, not related to the continent through a permanent infrastructure. It has to be separated from the continent by at least one kilometre and must not include a member state capital.

Considering this official definition the European islands represent 3.4% of the European Union surface (109 423 kilometres square) and 14 millions inhabitants.

The European Union Treaty mentions the islands on its article 154 to insist on the need to link insular regions to continental regions thanks to Transeuropean Networks. The article 158 of the Treaty and the annex Declaration number 30 of the Amsterdam Treaty insist on the necessity to take into account islands in the cohesion policy. The island issue is also dealt with in the ESDP and in the report of the Commission on economic and social cohesion. This different document put a stress on the structural handicap of these regions and drew a parallel with mountain regions.

Given these structural handicaps, specific policies are dedicated to insular regions. Islands benefit from the European Union regional policy. They receive subsidies from structural funds or from the cohesion funds in the framework of the objective 1 or the objective 2. What is more, they also received some funding through the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance. Islands also benefit from the Integrated Coastal Zone Management programme launched in September 2000 by the Commission. The sea and air transport infrastructures located in the Islands can be supported through operation in favour of Transeuropean Networks.

Consequently, the islands have become a category of the European spatial policy. Nevertheless, the definition of this category relies more on different kinds of political processes than to a definition based on geographic (distances) and socio-economic measures. Indeed, in geography an island is a notion defined as a surface of land surrounded by water. If it is true this notion is relatively vague (what is the surface to be considered to distinguish a

⁶ Launched by the Lisbon meeting in march 2000, the OMC is an endogenous learning process based on interactions, transfers and reforms of national policies, self-control, generally composed by 4 elements :

- Guidelines (based on a consensus on common objectives) and timing.
- Common indicators and identification of best practices (mutual learning process) in order to better policies.
- Policies established according to guidelines and the mutual learning process and taking into account national and regional diversity.
- Periodical assessment of policies.

island from a continent?), there is a kind of general agreement on what should be qualify as an island and what should be called a continent. In the field of European spatial planning policy, island is in fact defined through three different political processes identified below.

Firstly, the definition of the term “island” has much to do with the type of relations between central government of the member states and islands themselves. The question of the island became an issue in 1972 when Great-Britain and Denmark joined the European Economic Community because of the opposition of the inhabitants of the Isle of Man, of Greenland and of the Faroe Island. Given this opposition, these islands obtained a special treatment in the Treaty of adhesion of Great-Britain and Denmark supported by the two central governments concerned. Portugal and Greece did the same for the Azores, Madeira and the Canaries because of their constitutional autonomous status. The Aland Islands have also obtained derogatory status in the Finland adhesion treaty. But as a counterexample, the Gotland Island did not obtain a special status because of the opposition of the Swedish government. Finally, taking into account the general framework of European treaties, the status of an island is defined rather more through political bargaining than thanks to objective criteria as distances and socio-economic evaluations of the situation of this island.

Secondly, the definition of an island has also to do with the action of the member states by themselves particularly at the beginning of the eighties with the emerging dimension of the region and with the development of the regional policy. In that perspective, the promotion of a peculiar status for island is due to different convergent actions lead by member states as the creation of the Greek Ministry for the Aegean in 1985 or as those of France, Spain and Portugal to define the ultra peripheral regions (in the case of France : les Départements d’Outre-Mer).

Thirdly, this term has been also promote by organisation as the Conference of Peripheral Regions of Europe in particular through the creation in the framework of this institution of a commission dedicated to island in 1979.

The European institutions themselves have naturally taken a big part in the building of the notion. The first conference on Islands was organised by the Council of Europe in Tenerife in 1981. The “Tenerife Declaration” approved by the Council of Europe was used as a basis for the European legislation in that field. In 1988, the European council of Rhodes recognised that certain islands experienced specific socio-economic problems. The European Parliament has also worked in that field thanks to the “island intergroup”.

To conclude, the definition of island is a kind of ex-post process due to combined political actions at different level of power. It is now a statistic category and peculiar regional policies are dedicated to islands.

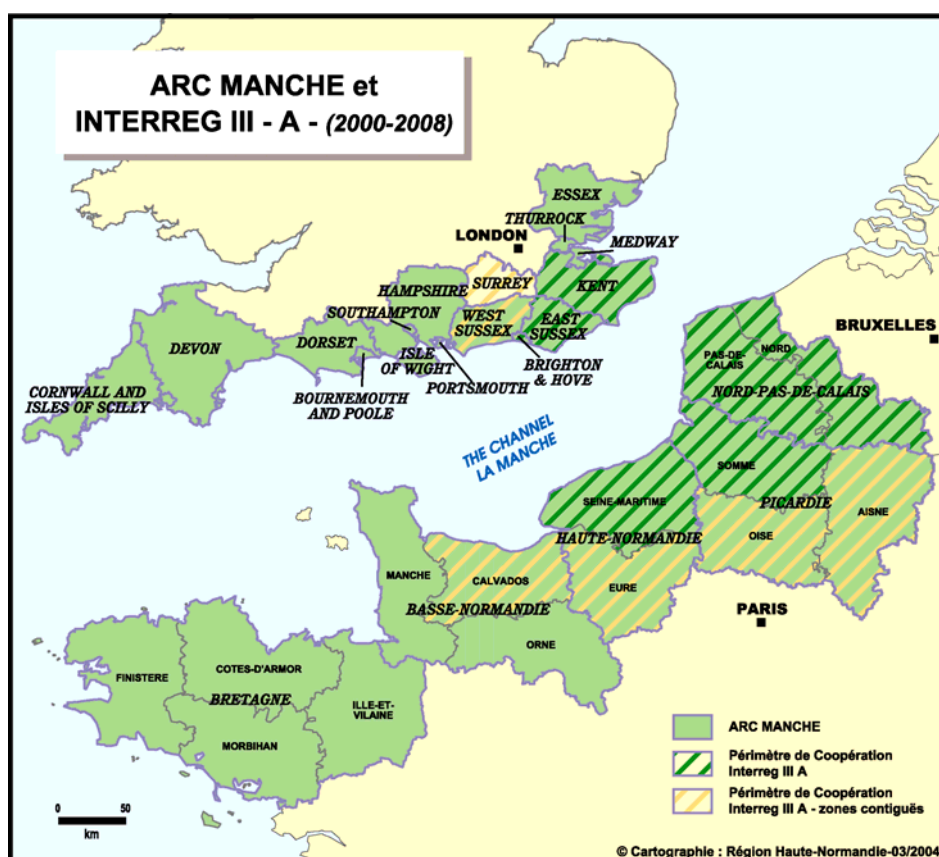
- Euroregion, an undefined notion and its territorial significance: the example of the two Normandies in France.

The word “Euroregion” is used to name a cross border structure along European frontiers. The AEBR (Association of European Border Regions) gives the following definition: a Euroregion is an association of local authorities located on both sides of a national border.

Nevertheless, this very useful word does not exist in the vocabulary of the European institutions. This is only the INTERREG Programs who legitimates these areas.

It is obviously a very symbolic notion. The Euroregions epitomize not only the deepening of the European integration but also the decreasing power of the Nation-State. Almost ten years before the beginning of INTERREG I, the Council of Europe had helped to ease cross border cooperation. The Madrid Convention in may 1980 allowed the local authorities on both sides of a border to cooperate with each other.

The Euroregions are very different one from each other according to the different background of the actors gathered. Sizes of the administrative units, competencies about taxes or spatial planning, socio-economic levels could change from one example to another. Euroregions are created for different reasons, following different ways : from top-down strategies (example : the drainage of the basin of the Neisse river) or from the observance of the habits of the commuters or consumers (example : between the Nord-Pas de Calais region in France and Belgium). Anyway, the final result is unpredictable particularly in their territorial consequences. The example of the two Normandies in France illustrates this point quite well.



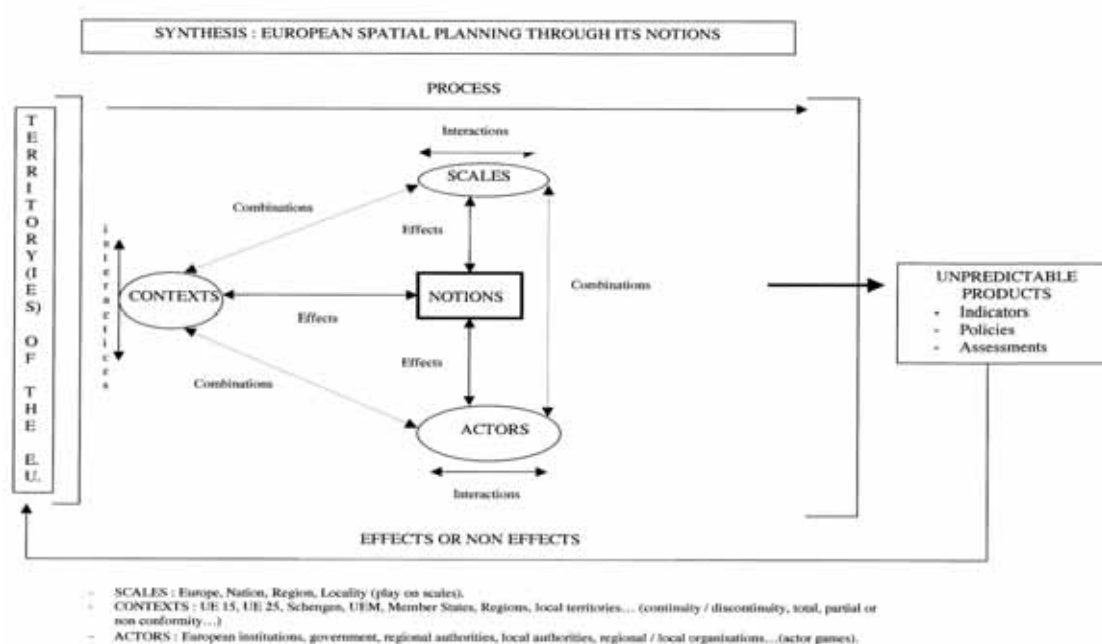
This part of France named Normandy is divided in two administrative regions (Lower Normandy and Upper Normandy). For some years this two regions show an increasing wish to cooperate. To some extent few political actors hope that this cooperation would be the first step of an (re)union of the former historical "Duché de Normandie", but most of them disagree with this aim.

From a national point of view, these two regions belong to the Paris Basin. Inside this Paris Basin, the strategic place of each region is quite different. Lower Normandy stays in an almost peripheral position, closer from Brittany than from Paris. Quite different is the position of the Upper Normandy along the Seine Valley axis. This region has very performing transport networks well connected with the Parisian hub. Consequently, the needs of these two regions in terms of spatial planning are quite different.

This situation implies to find share possible fields of cooperation between the two regions. At the European level, the two regions belong to the North West European Metropolitan Area (NWMA) and to the Atlantic Space. Cooperation exists between French regions and English counties thanks to the Community Initiative Programs, especially INTERREG trans-national or cross-border areas. Universities set up a common institution to cooperate ones with each others. Cities tried to deepen their relations. But only Upper Normandy region belongs to INTERREG III A. The result is that only a very small part of the Channel area is concerned. The Channel Sea is then divided in two parts with a new border between the two Normandies. As far as INTERREG III B is concerned, the Cross Channel Euroregion “Arcmanche” includes the two regions. The geographical territory runs, on the English side from the Kent to the Cornwall and, on the French side, from Nord-Pas de Calais region to Brittany region. This ambitious project was a failure and the program was stopped in 2003. Only the Upper Normandy is included in an INTERREG III C program called “Hanse Passage” (North Sea, Baltic Sea).

For all these reasons Lower and Upper Normandy can hardly cooperate at a national level or within an European Program even if such important issues as maritime safety and environment have yet been identified as common problems between France and the United Kingdom and between the two Normandies.

III – Synthesis



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